Access for All Customers: Universal Design for One-Stops

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One-Stop Career Centers were created with the goal of serving a wide customer population and to ensure that all customers benefit equally from their services. The diversity of needs presented by customers requires that One-Stop staff think broadly about how they can respond to these needs and structure services so that the greatest number of people can benefit. Setting up systems for each target group is expensive and labor intensive when common strategies exist that can work across many groups. This proactive approach limits the need or extent of service specialization that may be required to meet the needs of some audiences.

Universal Design was originally developed as an architectural concept that emphasizes creating and designing environments and services to meet as wide a range of preferences and needs as possible. Rather than thinking about a design solely from the perspective of a specific population such as individuals with disabilities, the design should consider alternative approaches to benefit customers from various backgrounds, learning styles, abilities, and disabilities.

To find a manageable approach to meet the needs of their many customers, One-Stops Career Centers need to think universally about how they design their physical space, service delivery systems and customer resources. While the individual experiences may be very different, the barriers faced by people who cannot read are similar whether they cannot read because of a cognitive disability, illiteracy, or limited English proficiency. The strategies to overcome this barrier and allow customers to benefit from Career Center services are going to be similar.

Background on Universal Design and Disability

When the Americans with Disabilities Act was originally passed, those who opposed it expressed concern about the expense of adapting things to meet the needs of a small percentage of the population. As this policy began to be implemented it became clear that changes that were originally intended to benefit individuals with disabilities were beneficial to the general public. The following are examples of changes that were considered special accommodations for individuals with disabilities that now have broader usage:

- Curb Cuts: while originally designed for ease of travel for individuals using wheelchairs, it is now estimated that only one out of a hundred people using curb cuts needs to do so because of a disability. Individuals pushing strollers, riding bicycles, rolling luggage or rollerblading all take advantage of this now standard way to access the sidewalk.
- Closed Captioned TV: Studies of the use of closed captioning for television/video indicate that individuals who are deaf or have a hearing impairment are not in the top five groups who use this technology. More frequently cited examples were

for people at gyms and sports bars, or those at home when one partner wants to watch television and the other wants to sleep.
- Electronic Door Opener: Delivery people, individuals with strollers, or those who are carrying multiple bags all benefit from having a door opened for them at times.

Principles of Universal Design *(I think we'll have this set off as a sidebar)*

Principle One: Equitable Use The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

- Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- Ensure that provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users.
- Make the design appealing to all users.

Example for a One-Stop: At orientation ask all customers if they need assistance completing registration rather than individuals you think may have a disability.

Principle Two: Flexibility in Use The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

- Provide choice in methods of use.
- Accommodate right or left-handed access and use.
- Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.
- Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

Example for a One-Stop: Provide an individual choices in activities that are more consistent with their learning style and/or needs. An individual may prefer an online or paper career interest inventory or may be more comfortable answering the questions through an interview.

Principle Three: Simple and Intuitive Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

- Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
- Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.
- Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills.
- Arrange information consistent with its importance.
- Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

Example for a One-Stop: Provide concrete, step-by-step instructions, allowing individuals to perform an activity and receive feedback on skills they are learning.

Principle Four: Perceptible Information The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

- Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information.
- Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.
- Maximize "legibility" of essential information.
- Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

Example for a One-Stop: During trainings and when possible in resource room, present information in both verbal and written formats and incorporate graphic representations so individuals can receive information in the manner which best suits them.

Principle Five: Tolerance for Error The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

- Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: the most used elements are most accessible; hazardous elements are eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
- Provide fail-safe features.
- Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

Example for a One-Stop: In resource room or library configure computers so that customers cannot inadvertently change settings. Leave a couple of computers with more flexible configuration so that they can more easily access the built in accommodation features.

Principle Six: Low Physical Effort The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

- Allow user to maintain a neutral body position.
- Use reasonable operating forces.
- Minimize repetitive actions.
- Minimize sustained physical effort.

Example for a One-Stop: Provide accessible workstations including at least one computer with voice recognition software so individuals can use the computer without physical exertion.

Principle Seven: Size and Space for Approach and Use Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

- Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user.
- Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
- Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
- Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

Example for a One-Stop: For group meetings much sure they are held in a large enough rooms so that individuals can turn around in a wheelchair or there is sufficient space for a sign language interpreter. Chairs should not be too close to the front of the room for accessibility as well as to allow the instructor to be seen by all group participants.

Principles and Guidelines developed at The Center for Universal Design, an initiative of the College of Design University of North Carolina

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http://www.design.ncsu.edu:8120/cud/univ_design/princ_overview.htm

Benefits of Universal Design in Career Centers

If universal design considerations are incorporated into the original design of a Center, the cost is typically low and creates a more aesthetically pleasing effect. If space or services need to be retrofitted once the design is set, it can interrupt the flow of services, and have a negative impact on as an add-on to existing procedures. This post-hoc design generally does not completely meet the needs of the individuals who require additional support nor the general public.

While Career Centers are mandated to serve everyone, the overall design reflects how welcome job seekers may feel. If their services are not welcoming or accessible, all individuals will not use it and the Career Center will lose out on serving a segment of their community. Individuals with disabilities represent approximately 45 million Americans and they may choose to take their business to Career Centers at which their needs are respected and addressed. In addition, the largest segment of the American population is aging, and many of these individuals will need to continue to work into their seventies. While many of these older workers may not have a disability, they could still benefit from a design that requires less physical exertion and supports memory and organizational skills.

Not all accommodations that individuals with disabilities may require will be met through a universal design approach. Focusing on services that are accessible to the largest number of people, however, will reduce the need for individuals to request "special services" and allow them to use the services immediately, rather than waiting to have the accommodation made. This approach will also reduce the demand on staff time since individuals will be able to work more independently. There will still be situations in which specific changes will have to occur in order for some customers to access services. Since fewer requests will be made, it will be easier to respond to those modifications that are needed.

Strategies

The following are strategies to consider for making the various components of Career Centers more accessible to all customers. For a more detailed listing of strategies, refer to Universally Designing one-Stop Career Center Services: A Checklist.

Welcoming Environment

- Display clear, visible signs that direct customers to the location of resources. This includes staff to whom questions should be directed, books, computer programs, telephones, availability of accommodations, etc. Clear signage is an essential tool for orienting customers to what is available.
- Maintain electronic files of materials being provided in the various workshops and, upon request, provide to customers in advance.
- Provide the option of registering and/or signing up for orientation/classes online prior to coming in so that orientation can be accomplished upon first visit. For individuals

who use specialized transportation services, being able to complete activities through the phone or web will reduce unnecessary trips.

Intake

- If a person needs assistance in filling out registration or intake forms, use private space, where the individual's responses will not be overheard.
- Indicate that alternate methods of completing intake forms are available. Have the option for people to complete the intake form electronically or to take the form home with them to complete and bring back.

Orientation

Group orientations are held in some Centers and allow new customers to learn about the range of services available at the Career Center and how to access these services. Components of orientation may include a review of the Center calendar where there are listings of workshops and special events. At the completion of the Orientation, staff can conduct a tour of the Center with new customers to reinforce what they learned in the orientation.

- Provide a written and oral overview of the orientation. This includes the time frame, what topics will be covered, and when questions should be asked. An outline like this will help people organize the information, serve as a reminder of what was covered, and reduce an individual's anxiety about whether their question will be addressed.
- Customers should not be asked to identify personal information during workshops or orientation. This includes information about disability, veteran status, computer literacy, etc. Maintain customer confidentiality by providing information concerning all additional services to subgroups of people, without requesting that they identify themselves to the group.
- Provide information regarding the self-service design of the Center. Let people know that customer assistance will be provided as needed to facilitate utilization of services.

Workshops

- Identify early in the presentation that questions are welcome throughout the workshop. In the event that new information is generated during the workshop, provide it in various formats. For example, state new ideas in addition to writing them on the flip chart. (e.g. web sites, phone numbers, and resources identified).
- Use concrete, basic language that is easily understood on handouts and throughout the presentation. Re-word current handouts that are abstract and/or require a higher educational level to understand.
- Consider creating an audio and/or videotaped version of the orientation and workshops provided. Offer these as an option for enhanced understanding of the information provided during the session. Some customers may benefit from referring

back to the information as needed. Sessions taped in alternate languages may also prove beneficial.

Print Material

- Provide page numbers on all documents. This approach allows instructors to refer to specific sections of the handout, which may be helpful to people who have trouble following all the information verbally.
- Supplement text with illustrative graphics (e.g. a labeled diagram of a cover letter and it's various components).
- Use a minimum of 12-point font size on all calendars and handouts. A 16-point font is preferred when possible.

Resource Room

- Use the technology available through America's Jobline for individuals who cannot read, but can listen to job postings over the phone. Individuals can call 1-800-441-5748 and follow prompts to menu choices. More information about America's Jobline is available at http://www.nfb.org/jobline/enter.htm.
- Use color-coding system to help make it easier for individuals to find resource material. For example, all resume development materials are in red binders and interview guidelines are in green binders.

These ideas are just a partial list of what is possible and are intended to help Centers think about making changes. At first glance, many of these ideas may seem too simple or obvious. However, people tend to get comfortable doing things a certain way and may assume everyone understands their procedures. To assess your center's success in actually providing services in the way that is accessible to most individuals, the occasional use of mystery shoppers may be useful. Mystery shoppers are individuals who are not known to the staff providing the service. They use the services as a customer and evaluate if their needs were meet and if the services are user-friendly. Finding mystery shoppers that represent individuals who have barriers to employment will help get a true read on whether the services meet their needs. Looking at services in this manner is not intended to be a compliance review or to catch staff doing something wrong, but as a way to continually monitor and improve services to meet your customers' needs. Designing the Center and services in a way that can broadly meet the needs of all customers will benefit staff as well as customers and will allow One-Stop Career Centers to truly meet the mandate of universal access.